The subjects of Chinese paintings are many. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the Chinese were the first to paint landscapes extensively. Religious themes have been favorites, especially in the heyday of Buddhism, and both Buddhist and Taoist figures and mythological and historical incidents have been frequent objects of representation. Flowers and trees have been used again and again. Especially has the bamboo been regarded as the test of an artist's ability. The bamboo is at once so employable by man in a wide variety of ways, such a common feature of the Chinese landscape, and so graceful, that it has made a marked appeal to the painter. Depicting the bamboo calls for the utmost skill in the application of the brush strokes which are the basis of Chinese pictorial technique. Only the master can do it well, and, naturally, many have made it a starting point of their endeavors. Birds, insects, fish, and animals have often served as models. Many, too, have rejoiced in portraying scenes from court life, famous historical incidents, and views of the life of humbler folk. There is a marked recurrence of themes: artists have often tested themselves by treating famous subjects and scenes.

The purpose of the Chinese artist has not been to give a photographic reproduction of a landscape or an object. In China poetry and painting have been closely associated. A painter often wrote poetry, and a distinguished poet was also often a painter. Buddhism and Taoism, both of them so largely subjective in their effects, have profoundly influenced painting. Perhaps it is for these reasons that the Chinese artist has attempted to give his own interpretation of what he has seen—to catch the spirit of his

subject and to reproduce it, or to seek to put down the impression which has been made on his own soul. In this, to be sure, he has not been unlike many Western artists.

Perhaps because of the Chinese philosophic attitude, man has been subordinated to nature, or, rather, he has been conceived of as part and parcel of the universe—not as dominating it but ideally as harmonizing with it. Many portraits have been made, and human figures have often been introduced into landscapes. Religious pictures, too, have included man. However, the attitude toward man has been quite different from that of the art of the ancient Graeco-Roman world and of European humanism of the Renaissance and modern times.